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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 02/25/09

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ARTICLES:

(1) Japan called "great partner" in summit meeting; U.S. has clearly turned away from unilateralism

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
Eve., February 25, 2009

By Satoshi Ogawa in Washington

In the Japan-U.S. summit meeting, President Obama lauded Japan as "a great partner," taking a stance that the U.S. together with Japan would work out resolutions to global-scale challenges. Such an approach differs from that of the Bush administration, which often would first make the decision and then ask Japan to agree to it. There is now the possibility for this kind of approach to become the standard for the Japan-U.S. relationship.

"The Afghanistan problem should be tackled by the international community. Every country needs to put in more efforts than before." In this way, the President in his meeting with Prime Minister Aso repeatedly stressed the need for every country including Japan to play a role. It was decided that Japan, too, would take part in the planning of a comprehensive strategy for assisting Afghanistan. There was an outstanding difference from the previous U.S. administration, which used words like, "Show the flag," and strongly

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requested that countries follow the U.S. lead in the "war on terror."

A former high-level State Department official said: "The Obama administration plans to greatly rely on the roles of its partners in the world even in national security areas." There has been a switch away from the foreign policy of the previous administration, which was known for its unilateralism. The stance of the Obama administration of aiming for each country to share the burden was reflected in the summit meeting between the President and Prime Minister Aso.

Prime Minister Aso, responding to such a stance, made an appeal regarding Japan's "unique fields," such as civilian assistance to Afghanistan and environmental technologies. A senior Foreign Ministry official proudly said: "In addition to bilateral and regional issues, talks covered global-scale problems, as well, proving that the Japan-U.S. alliance has become multi-layered."

However, it is conceivable that Japan, saddled with its unstable political situation, may not be able to rise to meet U.S. expectations of its "great partner" in the future. At that time, the new Japan-U.S. relationship will be put to the test.

(2) Japan burdened with heavy responsibility in exchange for prestigious invitation

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
February 25, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso and U.S. President Barack Obama held their first summit meeting in Washington on the morning of Feb. 24, local time. For Obama, this was the first meeting with a foreign state leader in the U.S. since he assumed the presidency.

U.S. to ask Japan to expand international contributions

Call for contributions

It was unprecedented for a new U.S. president to invite a Japanese prime minister as the first foreign leader to the White House, particularly at a time when he is busy preparing for his first State of the Union address before Congress.

The prime minister's meeting with the new president only one month after the president assumed office marks the third earliest, following the "Ikeda-Johnson meeting" and the "Takeshita-Bush (senior)" one. Kenji Hirata, secretary general of the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) caucus in the House of Councillors, criticized Aso's U.S. visit under the current gloomy economic situation, but a senior Foreign Ministry official commented: "It is significant for Japan and the U.S. to declare their determination to work hand in hand to tackle vital global issues." Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura said yesterday: "There is the basic perception that the President's stance of placing emphasis on Asia and favorable Japan-U.S. relations are vital for the world."

Focusing on the United States' preferential treatment to Japan, as shown by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Japan as the destination of her first official overseas trip, a Japanese government source fears that the U.S. might ask for Japan's contributions afterward. The source means that Japan may be asked to

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offer more contributions than before for reconstructing Afghan, to which the Obama administration gives priority, and neighboring Pakistan.

Speculations

Richard Bush, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, takes this view: President Obama's invitation of the Japanese prime minister as his first foreign guest stems from the judgment that "Japan will be a very helpful ally for the president in carrying out his policy challenges." In actuality, the two leaders confirmed the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance at the outset of the meeting.

The Obama administration hopes that the stock and dollar exchange markets will be favorably affected by demonstrating its willingness to jointly work with Japan to contain the global economic crisis. On climate change, the U.S. thinks that cooperation with Japan, which has jointly developed environment-related technologies with China, will make it easier to draw China into discussion on the issue. As a result, major business opportunities may be given to American firms. In addition, the U.S. anticipates that cooperation with Japan will make it easier for the U.S. to counter Europe, which has different basic views from the U.S. over a new international framework to fight global warming following the 2012 expiration of the Kyoto Protocol.

The expression "a helpful ally" also means that Japan naturally should offer its due contributions. As a symbolic case, the U.S. has called on Japan to take part in reviewing its comprehensive strategy toward Afghanistan. Balbina Hwang, who served as senior special advisor to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill until last month, pointed out: "High expectations tend to be accompanied by heavy responsibility, no matter whether it is money or civilian aid."

The Obama administration has proposed expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) trust fund for Afghan police officers and having countries concerned pay personnel costs. This idea is estimated to require 2 to 4 billion dollars annually. A Japanese government official said: "Once a framework for the plan is worked out, there will be no option for Japan to stay away from it. Unless Japan disburses at least several hundred millions of yen annually, Japan's contributions will not be appreciated." If Japan fails to win appreciation, "the Japan-U.S. alliance" will be downgraded, according to a diplomatic source of the U.S. Democratic Party. In this sense, as a senior Foreign Ministry official said, "Japan has been burdened with a heavy responsibility."

The role Japan is expected to play in addressing the financial and economic crisis can be cited as another reason. Japan trails only China as the largest foreign holder of U.S. Treasury bonds. To implement Washington's large-scale economic stimulus package, it will be necessary to float more government bonds. Some analyze that the Obama administration expects Japan to buy more U.S. Treasury bonds. The Japanese government views it unlikely for the U.S. government to immediately ask Japan to buy its bonds under the

current situation, but the situation may change depending on future economic conditions of the two countries.

U.S. less eager for personal confidence building

No lunch or dinner or other events aimed to establish a personal

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relationship between the two leaders were not set. Also, the U.S. did not arrange for a joint press conference after the talks. Aso was not accompanied by his wife, either.

For President Obama, there are few advantages from establishing a relationship of trust with Prime Minister Aso, who is losing political ground. Unless the U.S. underscores the stance of placing emphasis on Japan as a precondition for the U.S. policy of strengthening relations with China, as revealed during Secretary of State Clinton's visit to China, the U.S. could send a wrong message to the world audience. The Obama administration probably is also keeping in mind the Clinton administration of the Democratic Party having been criticized as "Japan bashing."

Given this, the Obama administration judged it necessary to hold a summit meeting with Japan before the U.S. holds a bilateral summit meeting with China. An informed source said that the reason why the Japan-U.S. summit was arranged in a quite short period of time was because "it would become difficult to set a summit meeting afterward because there is a possibility of increasing government instability in March or later."

The U.S. administration's real intention seems to have been "to demonstrate the stance of placing importance on Japan, and not on Prime Minister Aso," as analyzed by the said government source.

(3) Japanese, U.S. leaders meet under crisis: Prime Minister Aso eager to hold summit, motivated by desire to buoy up his administration

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The Japan-U.S. summit held on February 24 amid the backdrop of the financial meltdown was the first meeting between Prime Minister Aso and U.S. President Obama. To what extent the two leaders, who are so contrasting in terms of generation, background and political base, can build a relationship of trust to strengthen the bilateral alliance will determine the future course of the Aso administration, which is suffering from sagging public-support ratings.

When the President took office in late January, Aso cited similarities between himself and Obama: "We share the perception of the global economic crisis. We basically have the same method for bringing out the nation's potential."

The prime minister, who calls himself "the economic Aso," was calling for a summit with Obama even before he took office as president, noting that Japan and the U.S. as economic powers needed to indicate their resolve to cooperate to overcome the financial crisis. The talks on Feb. 24 are the result of the Japanese Foreign Ministry having frantically worked on the U.S. for a summit in order to respond to the prime minister's enthusiasm, according to an aide to Aso.

The prime minister is having trouble maintaining his administration, with public support ratings for his cabinet having dropped to 15 PERCENT and a non-support rate at 80 PERCENT. The president is still enjoying a high support rate of 60 PERCENT. Aso's ulterior motive, visible from time to time, is that he wants to create an opportunity to buoy up his administration by riding on Obama's coattails.

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In order for the two leaders to overcome the economic crisis, it is

necessary for them to hurry to reconstruct their countries' domestic economies.

The prime minister will aim at enacting the fiscal 2009 budget and compiling an additional stimulus package, as soon as he returns home. However, a storm is blowing in the ruling camp with many wanting to oust him.

Points of Japan-U.S. summit: Japan to take part in planning strategy to Afghanistan

Further strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance. Jointly deal with various issues facing the world.

Do the utmost for the reconstruction of each country's domestic economy with the aim of overcoming the economic crisis. Counter the spread of protectionism. Look into a new framework for bilateral economic dialogue.

Package settlement of North Korea's abduction, nuclear and missile issues. Collaborate to settle the abduction issue.

Japan to take part in the planning of a U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan. Japan to proactively extend assistance in the civilian area

Cooperation in assistance to Pakistan, as well.

Collaboration on the compilation of a mid-term goal for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Search for a framework for consultation among Japan, the U.S. and China.

Technology cooperation in the clean energy area. Japan ready to cooperate for a U.S. plan for a high-speed railway system.

(4) Ozawa placing his own imprint on foreign policy; 75 minutes with Wang, 30 minutes with Clinton

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) President Ozawa is now sending out his diplomatic signals. Ozawa recently met with U.S. Secretary of State Clinton and then met with Wang Jiarui, head of the Chinese Communist Party's international liaison department. In the meetings, an outline of Ozawa's style of diplomacy loomed as he would not cover up his friendly feeling toward China and constrained the United States.

With a change of government becoming more likely, there is a growing sense of alarm at home and abroad.

A special, close feeling toward China

On Feb. 23, Ozawa had quite a long conversation with Wang at DPJ headquarters. Wang visited Japan at the ruling parties' invitation. However, his meeting with Ozawa was longer than that with Prime Minister Aso, lasting one hour and 15 minutes.

"How was your meeting with Clinton?" In this way, Wang asked Ozawa about his meeting with the U.S. secretary of state on Feb. 17. Ozawa reportedly asked Wang about his visit to Pyongyang late last month when Wang met with North Korea's General Secretary Kim Jong Il.

Ozawa has a deep relationship with China as he has been promoting grassroots exchanges between Japan and China since 1989. In 2006, Ozawa visited China on behalf of the DPJ and created a mechanism for

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talks with the Chinese Communist Party. Since then, Ozawa has annually met with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

However, the meeting with Clinton was contrasting. It took time to have the meeting schedule arranged. Moreover, the meeting time was only some 30 minutes. In his meeting with Clinton, Ozawa stressed: "I am one of those who have maintained that the Japan-U.S. alliance is more important than anything else. However, one country must not be subservient to the other country in their bilateral relationship." Meanwhile, Ozawa referred to the China problem, saying, "It's inconceivable that North Korea will give up its nuclear card. Besides, China wants to maintain the present situation." He also said, "China's democratization of itself-or its soft landing-is the biggest task for Japan and the United States."

Ozawa, in his meeting with Wang, brought up his ideal regarding the trilateral relationships of Japan, the United States, and China, likening the trilateral ties to an "isosceles triangle" with the Japan-U.S. relationship and the Japan-China relationship being the same in length. "I have a special, close feeling toward China," Ozawa said. Ozawa thinks Japan and the United States are close at present, and Japan and China are far, but he thinks Japan and China should be close as well.

That stance, however, could be taken as meaning Japan and China join hands to constrain the United States. In point of fact, U.S. opinion leaders often voiced their concerns to DPJ executives, saying Ozawa might be anti-U.S.

"I had advice from an American friend," Ozawa said, "and I was told that I am being misunderstood." In this way, Ozawa underscored his stance of prioritizing the Japan-U.S. relationship. However, Ozawa is proud that he managed negotiations with the United States over Japan's market liberalization and international contributions about 20 years ago when Ozawa was with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. He is therefore bullish in what he says.

On Feb. 24, Ozawa visited the Nara prefectural city of Kashiba and he faced a reporter's question there about the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan. In reply, Ozawa developed his argument: "Japan should not always be at the beck and call of the United States. Instead, we, too, should have an appropriate global strategy. The question is what role Japan is going to play." At the same time, Ozawa referred to the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet, which is based in the Kanagawa prefectural city of Yokosuka and covers the West Pacific and the Indian Ocean. "For the United States to forward station troops at this time is meaningless," Ozawa said. "The Seventh Fleet alone is enough for the U.S. presence in the Far East," he added.

No action to U.S. on 4 issues

Recently, there has been a sharp increase in the number of requests to DPJ headquarters from various countries wishing to meet with party executives. The number of requests began increasing in December last year from the pace of once a week to three. The DPJ has actually held 30 meetings since that month. One from an Asian country's embassy in Tokyo explained: "The DPJ may take office. Given this possibility, we take it for granted."

On the morning of Dec. 19 last year, a group of U.S. experts met at a Tokyo hotel with DPJ leaders, including Naoto Kan, Yukio Hatoyama,

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Seiji Maehara, and Katsuya Okada. Among those visitors in the meeting was Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye, who is now being considered for the post of ambassador to Japan under the U.S. Obama administration. According to one of those present at the meeting, the U.S. group referred to "four pending issues": 1) the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA); 2) U.S. military realignment in Japan; 3) Afghan policy; and 4) refueling activities in the Indian Ocean.

The DPJ is upholding a drastic review of all the four points for an "equal Japan-U.S. alliance." However, the U.S. participants were concerned about this DPJ standpoint, with one of them saying: "If all these points are specified in the manifesto, that will be an obstacle to your smooth building of a relationship with the Obama administration." Maehara recalls, "Mr. Nye said he would regard us as anti-U.S." In concluding the one-hour meeting, the U.S. group suggested that the DPJ should send a delegation to the United States at an early date for coordination, according to Maehara.

Hatoyama and other DPJ executives began at once to discuss the idea of sending a delegation to the United States. However, Ozawa was cautious. According to one DPJ executive, Ozawa told the party executives in late January: "I will not meet with Obama until we take office. It would be just something for prep talks. When we took office, they may say different things. That's no good."

Meanwhile, the DPJ has its own circumstances. "There's no way we can enter into coordination with the U.S. side before the House of Representatives election," one of the DPJ's executives confessed. That is because the Social Democratic Party (Shaminto), a potential partner for the DPJ to form a coalition government, is on the same wavelength with the DPJ for a drastic review of the SOFA pact and the U.S. force realignment but is against sending the Self-Defense Forces overseas.

The election comes first. This is Ozawa's way of thinking. In the meantime, the government will ask the Diet during its current session for its approval of a treaty on the planned realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. Ozawa, when asked by a reporter whether the DPJ will consent to the treaty, went no further than to say: "Why don't you please ask about such an individual matter after we've taken office?"

DPJ may negotiate own plan for Afghan peace

Ozawa, though remaining critical of the United States, is paying close attention to the Obama administration's moves. The Obama administration regards Afghanistan as the main theater of war in the war on terror. For Afghan peace, the DPJ is now beginning to hold behind-the-scenes negotiations with various countries.

Tadashi Inuzuka, who served as a senior vice foreign minister in the DPJ's shadow cabinet until last month, visited Brussels and Washington on Feb. 14-20. In Afghanistan, the conflict between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Taliban, a group of antigovernment militants, was getting bogged down. Inuzuka explained the DPJ's initiative like this.

The United States and NATO withdraw their troops deployed to the Pakistani border, where the armed insurgents are based. Then, the SDF and an unarmed U.N. ceasefire monitoring delegation of

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representatives from Arab states will be sent there instead. In Tokyo, Afghanistan and Pakistan will hold working-level consultations and hold a summit meeting of their leaders.

Inuzuka, who worked out the initiative, and Kenji Isezaki, a professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies' graduate school, visited Afghanistan late last year with Ozawa's approval. Isezaki, who served as a special delegate of the Japanese government for Afghanistan's disarming, took part in the DPJ's work of drafting a bill in late 2007 to eradicate terrorism. The DPJ bill approved the SDF's limited deployment to a conflict-suspended area for civilian assistance.

The conflict-suspending initiative is in line with Ozawa's advocacy of sharing roles with the United States through proactive participation in U.N. operations. However, Ozawa criticized the Obama administration's plan to send reinforcements to Afghanistan. "They can never prevail," Ozawa said in a radio program aired on Feb. 16. Ozawa then stressed the idea of recovering farmland as Japan's possible contribution. The question is whether he will decide to send SDF troops there. Yet, he does not appear to be determined.

Policy differences between the government and the DPJ on major security issues

Government

SDF deployment overseas The government has sent the SDF overseas for specific issues under such legislative measures as the PKO Cooperation Law and the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, but the government is now considering a general law (or a permanent law allowing Japan to send the SDF overseas as needed). The government constrains the SDF's overseas activities under the Constitution that prohibits Japan from using armed force if it is not for the defense of Japan.

Afghanistan Under the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, the Maritime Self-Defense Force has been tasked with refueling multinational forces' naval vessels on stage mainly in the Indian

Ocean. Japan has sent no Ground Self-Defense Force troops to Afghanistan.

U.S. force realignment It is important to maintain deterrence and mitigate the burden of base-hosting localities in order to maintain and develop bilateral security arrangements between Japan and the U.S. Based on the agreement with the U.S. government, Futenma airfield in Okinawa Prefecture will be relocated to Nago City by 2014.

SOFA In conformity with SOFA provisions, the U.S. will hold suspects in custody until they are indicted in case the U.S. detains them, even though Japan has primary jurisdiction over them and even if their crimes were committed off duty. The custody of suspects may be turned over to Japan through improvements in the way of implementing SOFA provisions.

DPJ

SDF deployment overseas If there is a U.N. resolution, it is constitutional to use armed force outside the defense of Japan. Enact a general law (or a permanent law) for Japan's proactive participation in U.N. operations. Decision yet to be made on whether to send the SDF or a different organization (DPJ manifesto in 2006).

Afghanistan The DPJ is opposed to refueling in the Indian Ocean because there is no definite U.N. resolution. The SDF may be sent to

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a "conflict-suspended area" in Afghanistan for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance (DPJ-drafted antiterror bill in 2007). U.S. force realignment Alleviate Okinawa Prefecture's base-hosting burden immediately. Relocate Futenma airfield elsewhere outside Okinawa Prefecture, disperse USMC bases in Okinawa Prefecture to other locations outside Okinawa Prefecture or outside Japan, based on changes in the strategic environment (DPJ's Okinawa Vision in 2008).

SOFA Drastic revisions needed immediately. Japan has primary jurisdiction over U.S. military personnel even in the case of crimes committed on duty outside the areas of USFJ facilities, and Japan will hold suspects in custody at its facilities (ditto).

(5) DPJ President Ozawa harshly criticizes Japan-U.S. summit meeting: The U.S. did not put its heart into the talks

JIIJI PRESS (Internet edition) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Speaking to the press corps in Osaka this morning, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa harshly criticized the Japan-U.S. summit meeting between Prime Minister Taro Aso and President Barack Obama, saying: "With a prime minister who has lost the trust of 70 to 80 percent of the public, effective negotiations are impossible. The United States, too, probably did not put its heart into the various things talked about."

Ozawa also pointed out: "(The U.S.) has come out with policy of giving priority to Japan and Asia. In that context, even though the (meetings) that the prime minister's side requests from time to time are realized, there does not seem to be any contents to them." DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama told the press corps in Tokyo: "Can a prime minister with such a low level of public support be able to have talks on an equal level with President Obama? I doubt it. I can't imagine there was any specificity in the contents of the talks."

(6) Ozawa speaks of possibility of reducing U.S. forces in Japan: "The 7th Fleet would be enough"

JIIJI Press (Internet service) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Speaking to the press corps today in Osaka, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa expressed his thinking about the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, saying that it would be possible to reduce the U.S. presence but cutting the Army, Marines and other troops. He said: "If Japan has the resolve to do by itself what it should be doing by itself, there would be no need for the U.S. armed forces to forward deploy so many units in Japan. The

(U.S. Navy's) 7th Fleet would seem to be enough."

Ozawa pointed out, "Once Japan assumes its role on the security front, the role of the U.S. forces be reduced by that much." He stressed: "Japan must properly discuss with the United States its global strategy and then assume more responsibility than it has in the past." However, he did not touch at all on whether "Japan's responsibility" meant increasing Japan's defense power.

On the other hand, DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama, referring to Ozawa's remarks, told the press corps in Tokyo, "My understanding is that he was not envisioning an increase in Japan's military

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power."

(7) With sharp plunge in support rates, DPJ watching Aso cabinet from good vantage point; Party stops wrangling over fiscal 2009 budget, while paying attention to discord in LDP

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition force, is now looking on with folded arms at the sharp plunge in the support rates for the cabinet of Prime Minister Taro Aso. The DPJ has already ditched its policy of engaging in a fierce battle (with the ruling parties) in the Diet over the passage of the fiscal 2009 budget by allowing the ruling coalition to pass it by the March 31 end of the fiscal year. As such, the largest opposition party intends to closely watch what will occur in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) after the budget clears the Diet.

In Kashiba City, Nara Prefecture, on Feb. 24 just before Aso was expected to meet with U.S. President Barack Obama, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa told reporters with a smile:

"I think it is not good (for U.S. President Barack Obama) to hold talks with the prime minister, who has been told to leave office by most of the Japanese public. It is impossible for them to hold a substantive meeting."

A senior DPJ member said: "Since the LDP itself has stumbled badly, there is no need to drive Prime Minister Aso into a corner." This view is shared by many DPJ lawmakers. From this standpoint, the DPJ has decided to allow the passage of the fiscal 2009 budget before the end of this fiscal year. Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka views that there will be discord in the LDP as to whether the party should go into the next election under Aso's leadership or find a replacement. The best scenario for the DPJ is to see Aso dissolve the Lower House immediately after the budget clears the Diet. The DPJ has a heightened sense of alarm toward the idea of the LDP picking another prime minister without going through a Lower House election.

During a meeting on the night of Feb. 23 between Ozawa and veteran DPJ Upper House members, one participant said: "Considering that case in which the prime minister does not dissolve the Lower House, we should start working on the issue of (former New Komeito Chairman Junya) Yano." What they talked about was that the DPJ should demand the summoning of Yano to testify as a witness before the Diet. Yano has filed a complaint accusing the religious sect Soka Gakkai, the New Komeito's main backer, of obstructing freedom of speech. The DPJ is also considering issuing a censure motion against Aso and a no-confidence motion against the cabinet as options.

With a sharp plunge in the support rates for the Aso cabinet, senior DPJ members have now often use a term 'once the party is in power.' When requested by Mayor of Ginowan City Yoichi Iha that the base land to be vacated by the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station be returned to the city as early as possible, Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama said in a strong tone: "Once our party assumes the reins of political power, this is the very issue the new government will encounter. We will do our best." Iha asked Hatoyama to include the party's 'Okinawa vision' - which advocates the relocation of the Futenma Air Station from Okinawa to someplace overseas -- in its set

of campaign pledges for the next Lower House election, but Hatoyama made no reply. Ozawa, who has criticized the Japan-U.S. summit as meaningless, did not answer a question by reporters as to whether he was for or against an agreement on the relocation of U.S. marines on Okinawa to Guam.

Although there is a sense of emotional uplift in the DPJ, there are uncertain factors in the party. Ozawa said: "Japan should not blindly follow everything the United States says it should do," but the overall picture of what Japan-U.S. relations would look like will remain unclear until after the next Lower House election.

(8) Prime Minister Aso may try to find way to extend his administration by shuffling cabinet

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 24, 2009

Some officials in the government and ruling coalition are looking into the possibility of using a cabinet shuffle to extend the life of the Aso administration. The possibility has suddenly moved closer to reality because of the need to end as soon as possible the situation of Kaoru Yosano concurrently serving in three cabinet posts: finance minister, state minister of financial services, and state minister of economic and fiscal policy.

Aso has hinted at reviewing the appointment of Yosano holding three cabinet posts after the fiscal 2009 budget and related bills are enacted. Therefore, it is most likely that the cabinet will be shuffled at the same time when Yosano's wearing of three hats comes to an end. Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshitada Konoike in the Prime Minister's Official Residence and State Minister for Administrative Reform Akira Amari have both called for a cabinet shuffle.

A person close to Aso has asserted that replacing cabinet members is one option, since the present situation is that the public does not appreciate the prime minister's effort no matter how much effort he puts into coming up with policy measures.

Aso, however, is reluctant to shuffle his cabinet. The major reasons for the cabinet's plummeting support rates in the polls are Aso's gaffes, such as his flip flop on postal privatization. If Aso shuffles his cabinet, a chorus of voices from within the party and outside will call on him to step down. Aides to Aso, too, are not sure whether a cabinet shuffle is a good idea. The question is whether to give priority to finding the replacement for the unpopular Aso to lead the LDP into the Lower House election or whether to choose a cabinet of capable lawmakers to compile an additional economic package. Depending on how the cabinet is shuffled, those LDP members given the cold shoulder from Aso might react negatively.

Many members of the ruling camp are reacting coldly to the cabinet shuffle argument. A senior LDP member said: "The prime minister lacks the will to shuffle his cabinet."

(9) Aso administration with only 10 PERCENT public support

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)
February 24, 2009

Can Aso cabinet implement additional economic measures?

"Is it possible for the government to adopt a huge economic stimulus package under the current situation? Is it proper for the Aso cabinet to implement those measures?" Former Policy Research Council Chairman Yoshito Sengoku of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) asked these questions in a meeting of the House of Representatives Budget Committee yesterday.

Kaoru Yosano, Finance Minister and State Minister in Charge of Economic and Fiscal Policy, replied: "It is now essential for all of us to consider what measures should be taken to buoy up the economy, no matter who is in charge." There arose a small commotion in the room when he said, "no matter who is in charge." These words might be taken as expressing his view that it would be difficult to come up with an additional economic package under the Aso cabinet.

In the latest opinion survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun, public support for the Aso cabinet dropped to 11 PERCENT - the third worst on record (in the Mainichi polls). Many Liberal Democratic Party members say that the party will not be able to win the next election under Prime Minister Taro Aso. Close attention is now being paid to moves by Yosano, who has somewhat distanced himself from Aso.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa, Chairman Azuma Koshiishi of the DPJ Caucus in the House of Councillors, and several other members met at a Tokyo hotel last night. In anticipation of a collapse of the Aso administration, many participants said that only Yosano could be touted as a potential candidate to succeed Aso. A senior New Komeito member added: "If LDP members say it is desirable to go into the next election under someone other than Aso, we will accept that suggestions."

Unable to predict how the situation would develop after the fiscal 2009 budget is enacted, the government finds it difficult to compile an additional economic package. Even a senior government official was overheard grumbling: "Nobody knows whether the administration would be able to survive until a new package is prepared."

Prime Minister Aso left for Washington last night, after telling reporters: "I have to take the results of public surveys with humility."

While placing hopes on U.S. visit, Aso concerned about seen as "lame duck"

Prime Minister Aso attended an LDP executive meeting on the evening of the 23rd, in which he said: "The world is now facing a host of difficult issues, such as the global recession, environmental destruction, and global warming. I would like to fully discuss these issues with President Obama."

Aso, already driven into a corner, is eager to give a boost to his administration by producing positive results through the U.S. visit and then swiftly implementing economic stimulus measures.

Aso is also increasingly concerned that the Obama administration might see his administration as a "lame duck."

Visiting U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters on Feb. 17: "The U.S. will invite (the prime minister) to the White

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House on the 24th," but the next day's morning newspapers gave a great deal of space to the news of Shoichi Nakagawa's resignation as finance minister for improper behavior at a press conference after a meeting of Group of Seven (G-7) finance ministers and central bank governors. Eventually, the news about "the prime minister's visit to the U.S., and the Japan-U.S. summit" was completely overshadowed by the Nakagawa debacle.

Needless to say, Prime Minister Aso felt deeply embarrassed before Secretary Clinton, who brought to him the "honor" of being invited to the White House as the first foreign leader to meet President Obama.

In policy toward Russia, Aso also made a grave miscalculation. Aso attended talks with Russian President Medvedev on Feb. 18, with a strong resolve to pave the way to settling the Northern Territories issue. After the bilateral meeting, Aso told reporters: "There was no progress on the territorial dispute, the other side insisting on returning only two islands and this side demanding the return of all four islands." Inviting a reaction from conservatives, this remark

was harshly criticized by Hiroshi Kimura, professor emeritus at Hokkaido University: "His remark could give the impression to Russia that Japan has retreated from its conventional position of demanding the return of all four islands. This remark is a serious stain on Japan's territorial negotiations with Russia."

No progress has been made on the economic stimulus package, either. Although the second supplementary budget was enacted on Jan. 27, the Diet has yet to pass its related bills that would finance the government's cash handouts plan inserted in the second extra budget, in part because of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's remark: "I do not think that the government should enact the bills even by resorting to the override vote tactics." The government positions the handout plan as an eye catcher in the package, but 70 PERCENT of respondents in opinion polls by the Mainichi Shimbun said the plan did not merit appreciation. The former prime minister's declaration that he would abstain from a voting has also undermined the image of the plan.

To boost public support of the Aso cabinet, some in the government and the ruling camp are calling for shuffling the cabinet. But Aso has been quoted as saying: "I have no intention to replace the members because there are no flaws in them." In the run-up to the expiration of the Lower House members' terms of office, Aso remains unable to prepare measures to get more public support.

(10) U.S. serviceman gets six-month prison term for sexually assaulting Philippine woman: Court martial decides to drop rape charge

Okinawa Times (Page 1) (Full)
Evening, February 24, 2009

With U.S. Army Colonel Donna Wright presiding, U.S. forces began on February 24 at Kadena Air Base a general court-martial against Army specialist Ronald Hopstock, 25, who is stationed in Okinawa, on the charge of having sexually assaulted a Filipino woman in Okinawa City in February 2008. The court martial was completed that same morning, with the defendant sentenced to six months in prison and demoted to a private. He also received a dishonorable discharge from the Army for unlawful conduct. With agreement having been reached by prosecutor and attorney before the trial, the punishment was decided

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beforehand, and the case was closed the same day.

The rape charge was dropped. The sentence was handed down regarding three violations of the unified court martial act, such as that the defendant went outside the base on his own in defiance of the commander's order. Hopstock will likely be taken into custody immediately.

Referring to the rape charge, U.S. Army Japan spokesman James Crawford explained: "According to examinations made by both Japanese and U.S. doctors, there was no evidence suggesting rape. Therefore, the decision was reached to drop that charge."

Representatives of four Japanese media organizations attended the court martial.

Hopstock belongs to the First Air Defense Artillery Regiment First Battalion at Kadena Air Base. He is now performing regular duties, based on the determination that there is no possibility that he can escape. He is not being detained or placed under surveillance.

The incident occurred at an Okinawa hotel on February 18 last year. The Prefectural Police sent papers to the prosecutors charging Hopstock with committing rape resulting in bodily injury. However, the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office in May dropped the case because of insufficient evidence.

The U.S. Army's investigative authority started its own investigation in May and decided to charge him in July. It has been listening the circumstances from Hopstock and the Filipino woman.

ZUMWALT